



[G W F Hegel, 1770 - 1831](#)

Hegel and Marxism

[G W F Hegel](#) refused to make anything easy. Towards the end of his [Introduction to the Encyclopaedia](#) (1830) he wrote:

“As the whole science, and only the whole, can exhibit what the Idea or system of reason is, it is impossible to give in a preliminary way a general impression of a philosophy. Nor can a division of philosophy into its parts be intelligible, except in connection with the system.”

This could mean: Until you know it, you can't know it. It is not helpful!

But in practice, even Hegel fails to be completely impossible. The same "Introduction to the Encyclopaedia" is actually one text of Hegel's that can be read relatively normally. We will come to it later in this first part of our course on Hegel.

We are not going to "learn Hegel" in its entirety in ten weeks, or at all. Instead, we are looking for the salient points – the ones that stick out – so that we can have some dialogue about them.

We will begin with Karl Marx, because in this course we are particularly looking at the relation of Hegel to Marx. So we may as well allow Karl Marx to explain that.

Marx got his doctorate in 1841 with a dissertation on the Philosophy of Epicurus. This was his only overt work on philosophy. Immediately thereafter, he got involved with the *Rheinische Zeitung* magazine project, soon becoming the editor. Marx then wrote a lot, including sometimes about Hegel, until 1845 when, as we have argued elsewhere, he and Engels become for the first time "Marxists" in full, coinciding with their joint writing of the "[Theses on Feuerbach](#)" and "[The German Ideology](#)".

Perhaps Marx never was a "Marxist". He is supposed to have denied it. But whether from a "Marxist" point of view, or not, Marx was probably the best critic of Hegel, among the many who had sprung up from the official Prussian [1841 Expurgation](#)

[of Hegel](#), onwards.

We take Marx's famous 1844 "[Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right](#)" first (attached; download linked below). The full book, "[Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right](#)", can also be found on the Marxists Internet Archive. In the Introduction, the not-yet-fully-Marxist Karl Marx writes:

"The criticism of the German philosophy of state and right, which attained its most consistent, richest, and last formulation through Hegel, is both a critical analysis of the modern state and of the reality connected with it, and the resolute negation of the whole manner of the German consciousness in politics and right as practiced hereto, the most distinguished, most universal expression of which, raised to the level of science, is the speculative philosophy of right itself."

Marx's "[Critique of Hegel's Philosophy in General](#)", also, like the Critique of the Philosophy of Right, never published in Marx's lifetime, is given here primarily because it moves around Hegel's works in a way that may assist readers to begin to mark out some of the salient points (also attached, and linked below).

For an example of the confident way that the young Marx writes about Hegel, and for some hints of things to come, and possible ways forward, see this passage:

"There is a double error in Hegel. The first emerges most

clearly in the *Phänomenologie*, the birth-place of the Hegelian philosophy...

*“The outstanding achievement of Hegel’s *Phänomenologie* and of its final outcome, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generating principle, is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of labour and comprehends objective man – true, because real man – as the outcome of man’s own labour.*

*“We shall now demonstrate in detail Hegel’s one-sidedness and limitations as they are displayed in the final chapter of the *Phänomenologie*, “Absolute Knowledge” – a chapter which contains the condensed spirit of the *Phänomenologie*, the relationship of the *Phänomenologie* to speculative dialectic, and also Hegel’s consciousness concerning both and their relationship to one another.”*

In that case one could read the whole of this passage of Marx’s, and then read the [final chapter of the Phenomenology](#), (in German, “*Phänomenologie*”) and then one would have appreciated some of the strength and the weakness of Hegel, at least as Marx saw them. And it is through Marx, as much as through anyone, that the legacy of Hegel stands as large as it does in the world today.

To put the matter fully in Karl Marx's hands for the moment, we can quote from his [Afterword to the 2nd German edition of "Capital" Volume 1](#) (1873). Here, Marx "openly avows himself the pupil of that mighty thinker [Hegel]", and quite briefly explains why:

"My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of "the Idea," he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of "the Idea." With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.

"The mystifying side of Hegelian dialectic I criticised nearly thirty years ago, at a time when it was still the fashion. But just as I was working at the first volume of "Das Kapital," it was the good pleasure of the peevish, arrogant, mediocre Epigonoι [Epigones – Büchner, Dühring and others] who now talk large in cultured Germany, to treat Hegel in same way as the brave Moses Mendelssohn in Lessing's time treated Spinoza, i.e., as a "dead dog." I therefore openly avowed myself the pupil of that mighty thinker, and even here and there, in the chapter on the theory of value, coquetted with the modes of expression peculiar to him. The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious

manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.

“In its mystified form, dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and to glorify the existing state of things. In its rational form it is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.”

- The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Intro, 1844](#), and [Critique of Hegel's Philosophy in General, 1844](#), both by Karl Marx.
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).